

Remarks at the White House Tribal Nations Summit

November 30, 2022

The President. Hello, hello! Thank you, thank you, thank you.

Please, take a seat if you have one. [*Laughter*] I say that because one day I said, "Take a seat," and everybody said, "He doesn't even understand there's no chairs out here." [*Laughter*]

Well, Deb, thank you, Madam Secretary, for that introduction. Thirty-five generations of ancestors in New Mexico and the first Native American Cabinet Secretary in American history. Deb, I want to thank you for your leadership in the Interior Department and the stewardship of the nation-to-nation relationships that I say to my fellow leaders out there. And I mean that sincerely.

To all the Tribal leaders: Thank you. Thank you, thank you, thank you. Thank you for being here and for your partnership.

I made a commitment when I ran for President. As a matter of fact, I made a commitment when I was basically a 30-year-old Senator and a student of Danny Inouye, the Senator from the State of Hawaii, who made it clear to me—because I said "Indian Country." He said, "No, Indian Nations." Indian Nations. You know, I made a commitment that my administration would prioritize and respect nation-to-nation relationships. And I'm going to make sure that happens.

I hope our work in the past 2 years has demonstrated that we're meeting that commitment. And that's why I relaunched this convening and elevated an event into a White House Tribal Nations Summit because—after the previous administration failed to convene any events, anything on this scale.

On my watch, we're ushering in a new era of—and advancing a way for the Federal Government to work with Tribal Nations. And it starts by appointing Native Americans to lead the frontlines of my administration. You know, starting with Secretary Haaland, we've followed dozens of Senate-confirmed Native American officials, over 60 Native American appointees all across my administration, including in the Federal courts.

I restored the White House Council on Native American Affairs to improve interagency coordination and decisionmaking. Together—I emphasize the word "together"—together, my entire administration is advancing the economic agenda and making historic investments in Indian Country—and, I might add, that are long overdue.

Facing a pandemic and economic crisis that disproportionately impacted Tribal Nations, I invested more than thirty-five—\$32 billion in the American Rescue Plan, the largest one-time-ever direct investment in Indian Country in American history.

During the pandemic, Native Americans were contracting the virus three times—three times—the rate of other groups and losing their lives at twice the rate of other groups. But together, we used that funding to help Tribal communities go from one of the most harmed groups by COVID to one of the most vaccinated communities in the entire country.

And to all my fellow leaders, you used that funding to address other critical needs as well, such as housing, food assistance, support for Tribal economies, and for schools and language. In fact, last year, Jill, my wife, traveled with Deb to the Cherokee Immersion School in Oklahoma. The Cherokee Nation used part of this funding to start building a second school and revitalize the use of the Cherokee language.

By the way, she spent a lot of time on other reservations—other Nations as well. I'm worried she's not going to come home one of these days—[*laughter*]—when she goes. You think I'm joking. I'm telling you, if I hear more about the Navajos than I hear about me—[*laughter*]. You all think I'm kidding, don't you?

At any rate, learning Native languages leads to better outcomes in school, builds confidence in students, and passes down old traditions to new generations. It matters. But it didn't stop there. Together, we're continuing to make a difference.

I also made the largest single investment in our Nation's infrastructure since President Eisenhower's national highway program, the biggest investment in Indian Country infrastructure ever in history. More than \$13 billion in rebuilding infrastructure in Indian Country. And to state the obvious, it's long overdue.

And we're putting it to work together: building water infrastructure for clean drinking water, safer plumbing systems; delivering affordable, high-speed internet; repairing roads and bridges; restoring waterways that are now blocked by roads and highways that affect the migration of salmon that's essential to the livelihoods and cultures of so many Tribes; electrifying diesel school buses so Tribal children don't breathe that polluted air generated by diesel engines.

And in South Dakota, \$29 million of infrastructure funding to help us repair two old dams built in the forties, and the other—the first in the forties, the other in the sixties—on the Pine Ridge Reservation.

For years—for years and years now—the Tribes have lived in the shadow of disaster, worried the dams would break and destroy their communities. So, soon, they will be able to sleep a much more peaceful night, knowing those dams have been fully repaired and rebuilt.

This past summer, we also ushered in a new era of confronting and adapting to the climate crisis. I signed a law that made the biggest investment ever—ever in all of history—that includes \$700 million exclusively for Native communities.

I see the—our Secretary of Agriculture here, who has also made it clear and made a major contribution on seeing to it that we use farmlands to absorb carbon from the air and so much more and pay farmers for doing it. It's going to help mitigate the impacts of extreme droughts and wildfires and rising sea levels that affect sources of Tribal foods, Tribal resources, Tribal traditions, and Tribal ways of life.

It's going to bring clean electricity into your homes. It's going to develop homegrown clean energy so Indian Country helps lead the future to the goal we've set of 100 percent carbon-pollution-free electricity by the year 2035. You're all part of that, and you're going to help lead that.

To ensure these investments reach Native lands, my administration is going to work with the Tribes to help them transition to clean energy development and do it quickly. That includes the Federal Government, as the largest single energy consumer in the world, buying more carbon-free electricity from Tribal energy producers.

We're also going to launch a new electric vehicle initiative for Tribal Nations to ensure that our nationwide electric vehicle network includes Native communities. And, as all of you know, there are Tribal communities at risk of being washed away—washed away—by superstorms, rising sea levels, and wildfires raging.

I've flown over literally several thousand acres of the storms and the fires set in the West in particular and also down in the Southwest. And it's devastating. That's why today I'm announced a \$135 million commitment to help 11 Tribal communities from Maine, Louisiana, Arizona,

Washington State, and Alaska to move, in some cases, their entire communities back to safer ground and pay for that.

I've also requested \$9.1 billion—that's with a "b"—billion dollars for the Indian Health Services. I've asked Congress, for the first time ever, to make that funding mandatory—[*applause*]—a mandatory part of the Federal budget. That means the funding would always be there, and it insulates Indian Health Services from budget uncertainties to [that; White House correction] make it harder to deliver the care Indian Country needs and deserves.

Audience member. Thank you!

The President. Well, thank—we've got to get it done. I need your help in getting it done.

And here's another thing that's very important to me: In last year's summit, I signed an Executive order to improve public safety and the criminal justice for Native Americans and to respond more effectively to the epidemic of missing and murdered Indigenous people.

Since then, the United States Departments of Justice and Interior have created a lead, new Federal agency enforcement strategy that makes—that takes the special circumstances of these crimes into account.

This is a priority to me and to the Justice Department. And so it's using the Violence Against Women Act, which I wrote myself 30 years ago—as my sister would kid and say, "with my own paw." [*Laughter*] I sat down and wrote that because I feel so strongly about it—to end the scourge of violence against women everywhere.

This year, I was proud to sign a reauthorization of this law that includes historic provisions that strengthen Tribal sovereignty and safety.

And today—and today—I'm announcing even more critical actions that are the result of a meaningful and deliberate consultation process with you all. My administration listened, we heard you, and we're implementing many of the changes you asked for. Today I signed a new Presidential memorandum that improves consultation between the Federal Government and Tribal Nations based on key principles. Consultation has to be a two-way, nation-to-nation exchange of information.

Federal agencies should strive to reach consensus among the Tribes. And there should be adequate time for ample communications. The Federal agencies should prepare a public record for what's transpired during those consultations. And Tribal Nations should know how their contributions influenced the decisionmaking.

And this is a new Presidential memorandum requires all relevant Federal agencies to get annual training on Tribal consultation process. Let me say that again: all Federal agencies. And so, folks, this is a whole changed approach.

My administration will also continue using all the available authorities, including the Antiquities Act, to protect sacred Tribal lands. Deb was with me—[*applause*]. Deb was with me last year at the White House when I restored the national monuments at Bears Ears and the Grand Staircase-Escalante in Utah—[*applause*]*—the National Canyons and Seamounts in New England.*

And last month, I traveled to Colorado to declare Camp Hale-National Continental Divide the first new national monument in my Presidency using the Antiquities Act. Millions of acres. And look—[*applause*]. And there is so much more. There's so much more that we're going to do to protect the treasured Tribal lands.

When it comes to Spirit Mountain and its surrounding ridges and canyons in southern Nevada, I'm committed to protecting this sacred place that is central to the creation story of so many Tribes that are here today.

Audience member. All right.

The President. And—[*applause*]. And I'm grateful to so many of you who have led the fight to protect it. I especially want to thank Nevada's congressional delegation. I know there's a lot going on and—well, I can see a couple here now.

I see Dina Titus is here. Dina, how are you? Thank you for the support.

Is Catherine here—Cortez Masto? She was—she—and Senator Rosen—they both are—there's a little action going on in the United States Senate to try to prevent a rail strike. [*Laughter*]

Is Representatives Lee and Horsford here? Well, you've got the best of the group here, Dina. She's an old friend and a strong supporter. And I look forward to being able to visit Spirit Mountain and experience it with you as soon as I can.

And, folks, look, I also want to thank Raul, chairman of House Natural Resources, and—for his leadership across the board on all the efforts I've talked about here today. I'm also announcing that Deb, as Secretary of Interior, will continue to work with the Secretary of Agriculture—as I said, is here—to costewardship the Federal lands, because that's what it is.

We've already signed over 20 new agreements with Tribes this year, giving them a greater role in the stewardship of Federal lands that are important to their cultures. And it's not stopping there. We have 60 additional cosponsors—costewardship agreements currently under review. And I'm announcing today that the Secretary of Commerce is going to formally join these efforts as well.

So let me close with a word my dad used all the time: respect. Everyone is entitled to be treated with respect and dignity, the dignity that comes from just being who we are. This is especially true for Tribal Nations to whom the United States owes a solemn trust and treaty obligations that we haven't always lived up to.

When I talk about respect, here is what I mean by respect: respect for Tribes as nations and treaties as law.

Audience member. [*Inaudible*]

The President. Respect for—beg your pardon?

Audience member. [*Inaudible*]

The President. I thought—I thought you said "no."

Audience member. Thank you!

The President. I was getting a little worried. I thought you said—someone said "no."

Respect for Indigenous knowledge and Tribal consultations as a key part of the Federal agency decisionmaking. Respect means we'll defend Tribal sovereignty and self-government and self-determination. And we'll support—[*applause*]. And we'll support Tribal economies and keep fighting for better Tribal health care, child care, education, housing, public safety, and so much more. And respect means being there in person to show it.

You've seen Jill. You've seen my wife, Jill, in Indian Country. She's at a funeral this morning for the mother of a friend of ours. And—but I've spent a lot of—she's spent a lot of time—I've spent a lot of time in Indian Country as a Senator and Vice President. But I can say here today I intend to make official Presidential visits to Indian Country to make it official. Let's do it.

And I will do so in the enduring spirit of our nation-to-nation relationship, the spirit of friendship, stewardship, and respect. It's taken too long for us to recognize this is the only way to

move forward, but my administration is doing all it can to demonstrate our commitment to those timeless ideals.

So thank you. Thank you for being here. Thank you for your leadership. Thank you for your partnership. And I'm sure I'll make mistakes, but you know me. Don't hesitate to correct me when I make them. I know you; you won't hesitate. *[Laughter]* But I really mean it.

Audience member. You've got that right!

The President. I really mean it. Well, I'll tell you what, no one has ever done as much as President as this administration is doing. Period. Period. I am committed. And as my grandfather Finnegan would say, "That's the Irish of it." Thank you all very much.

Audience member. Four more years!

The President. Oh, I don't know about that.

Thanks. Thank you, thank you, thank you. Finally, finally, finally. Let's keep it going, okay? Thank you.

NOTE: The President spoke at 11:57 a.m. at the Department of the Interior. In his remarks, he referred to Rep. Raúl M. Grijalva. He also referred to his sister Valerie Biden Owens.

Categories: Addresses and Remarks : White House Tribal Nations Summit.

Locations: Washington, DC.

Names: Biden, Jill T.; Cortez Masto, Catherine; Grijalva, Raúl M.; Haaland, Debra A.; Horsford, Steven A.; Lee, Suzanne K.; Owens, Valerie Biden; Raimondo, Gina M.; Rosen, Jacklyn S.; Titus, A. Constadina; Vilsack, Thomas J.

Subjects: American Indians and Alaska Natives, Tribal relations with Federal Government; Broadband and wireless technologies; Carbon emissions, reduction efforts; COVID-19 pandemic; COVID-19 vaccines; Dam repair and removal; Economic improvement; Electric and hybrid vehicles, promotion efforts; Electric vehicle charging infrastructure, improvement efforts; Farmland, pastures, and forests, carbon-mitigation role; Federal programs, improvement efforts; Government accountability and transparency, strengthening efforts; Indian Health Service; Infrastructure improvements; Lead service lines, replacement efforts; Missing and murdered Indigenous people, Federal investigation support; Public and Tribal lands, conservation and management; Renewable energy sources and technologies; Secretary of Agriculture; Secretary of Commerce; Secretary of the Interior; Tribal schools and language preservation; Water management policy, improvement efforts; White House Tribal Nations Summit; Wildfires, damage and recovery efforts.

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